

The sentencing of Bradley Manning

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The sentencing of whistleblower Bradley Manning to a 35-year prison term concludes a trial that will be remembered as a milestone in the collapse of American democracy. The true criminals in these proceedings hid under the cloak of the accusers, as a military court sought to whitewash the state crimes revealed by Manning by organizing a show trial against him.

Manning's sentence was ordered by a government whose criminality is unparalleled. Its victims include over one million dead Iraqis, hundreds of thousands of dead Afghans, thousands murdered by drone strikes and disposition matrices, and the casualties of torture and black site rendition. Manning is locked away for exposing some of these crimes, for which no government official has been held accountable.

These crimes have been accompanied at home with the construction of the framework for a police state. As the NSA revelations leaked by Edward Snowden have shown, hundreds of millions have been subjected to the US government's unconstitutional surveillance programs.

Fearing the broad opposition to these crimes in the American population, the Obama administration set out in the Manning trial to terrorize and silence anyone who, like Manning, might speak out against it. In the words of lead prosecutor Captain Joe Morrow, the government aimed to "send a message to any soldier contemplating stealing classified information," to "ensure we never see an act like this again."

The reactionary aims of the trial found expression in repeated violations of basic democratic principles.

None of the charges against Manning had any legal or moral substance in comparison to the real crimes of those who prosecuted him. During the trials of Nazi war criminals after World War II, Supreme Court justice and Nuremberg Tribunal chief prosecutor Robert Jackson established the widely accepted principle that preparing and waging wars of aggression

is the supreme war crime and crime against humanity. By Jackson's standard, it is President Obama, President Bush, and other top US officials who should be put on trial.

Officials ignored Manning's right to a speedy trial, forcing him to wait three years before a court appearance. During this period, the government subjected Manning to months of torture. Yesterday, Judge Denise Lind ruled that Manning's 35-year sentence should be reduced by only 112 days to make up for the 11-month period in which Manning was unconstitutionally kept in solitary confinement.

Despite a formal conclusion from the United Nations' top torture official that the US government was guilty "of cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment towards Bradley Manning," the trial continued.

Obama defied constitutional due process by brazenly asserting that Manning was guilty before the trial had even begun: "We don't let individuals make decisions about how the law operates. He broke the law." This statement violates the 800-year-old democratic principle that a defendant is innocent until proven guilty.

The trial made a mockery of freedom of the press, as the state suppressed any reporting of the trial that would have exposed its antidemocratic character. Government and military officials drastically limited media access, censoring hundreds of pages of court documents; in the first weeks of the trial, almost no information was made public regarding court proceedings.

Those corporate news outlets that covered the trial launched vituperative assaults on Manning, denouncing him as a "traitor."

Even Manning's lead defense attorney, David Coombs, resorted to disparaging his own client. Coombs has attempted to portray Manning as having "narcissistic personality traits" and has downplayed

Manning's acts as the "naïve" result of Manning's "post-adolescent idealism stage."

Instead of addressing the criminality revealed by his client's leaks, Coombs attempted to portray Manning's actions as the unfortunate results of Manning's supposed emotional or sexual concerns. These debased declarations had nothing to do with the substance of the trial. Contrary to Coombs's depiction, Manning's courageous deeds were not caused by mental instability, but were the product of courage and political principle.

This courage and principle were not diminished by the humiliating statement Manning was compelled to make at his sentencing hearing on August 14. "How on Earth could I, a junior analyst, possibly believe I could change the world for the better over those with the proper authority?" he said. In reality, millions of people, including Manning, are well aware that "those with the proper authority" are responsible for war crimes and must be stopped.

The fact that the court found it necessary to elicit such a statement testifies to its own political and moral corruption.

As a political prisoner, Bradley Manning stands in the company of many, including such figures as Edward Snowden and Julian Assange, whose opposition to the crimes of the American state has drawn the ire of the Obama administration.

Their defense cannot rely on appeals to either of the United States' two big-business parties, who are equally intent on keeping Manning in prison and continuing to commit new crimes against the population of the United States and the world.

Manning can only be defended through the building of a mass working-class movement that takes up the defense of democratic rights, mobilizing the broad opposition to the crimes of US imperialism under the banner of the struggle for socialism. Long before his sentence is up, it will fight to secure the release of Bradley Manning from prison and to put his accusers on trial.



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